**Jenni**

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I stood there in shock. I didn't care that I was wearing nothing but soot covered cotton t-shirt that I'd worn to bed. I didn't care that I had a cut on my thigh from when I climbed out the window of my room.  
  
  
  
What I cared about was my mother, my only family. She was gone. Dead. The small house we'd lived in for the past decade was dripping burned ruin.   
  
I'd been awoken by a crash as something fell. When I'd opened my eyes, black, noxious smoke was filling my room through a gap under my bedroom door. I could see patches of red flame as the door began to burn through. I felt the heat rushing through the new gaps.  
  
I had time, only, to rush to my small bedroom window, open it and squeeze through the gap. It wasn't until later that I realized the cut in my thigh must have come from that climb through the window – I never figured out another explanation.  
  
My mother didn't make it out. I was told in the days that followed that she'd fallen asleep smoking on the couch she'd first bought in 1973. She didn't have a chance, and in our poorly built house, I was fortunate to get out alive.  
  
I didn't move until a fireman came and stood between the fire and me. He took my shoulders leaned close, and whispered in my ear, ''Let's get that cut in your leg taken care of.'' He turned my body away from the fire and slowly walked me over to a blanket he'd put on top of some sort of equipment box.  
  
I was numb through the entire process, but that's when it started. In the years to come, my desire to show my body, to be seen, to feel a burning flush hit my body in lustful embarrassment. I didn't think about it then, but as that fireman tended to the cut on my thigh, I later realized, he could see my most private area, my pussy, covered with a light red down under my t-shirt. I didn't cover myself up, or even know I was exposed then, but the memory still brings a blush to my cheeks as I think about it. And that's where it started - on the day my mother and only family died.  
  
  
  
Fucked up. But that's life.  
  
  
  
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It took two years for me to emerge from a desperate depression. I'd rented a dark basement suite from which I rarely emerged. I had groceries delivered. I never called anyone or had anyone visit. I didn't even own a computer or have the internet. I went to the library once a week and picked up books. I'd be wearing one of 3 pairs of baggy black sweat pants and matching hoodies I'd bought the day after my life burned down.  
  
I don't know what changed, but one day I realized that I needed to change my life. I needed to, and it was ok to move on.   
  
Actually, I do know what changed. This is supposed to be an honest journal of my experiences. One day my groceries were delivered earlier than I'd expected, and I was taking one of my rare baths. I answered the door in a hoody I'd pulled onto my wet body when I heard the knock at my door. When I answered the door, it wasn't the usual woman who delivered my groceries. Instead it was her son, someone I'd met before; his mother was always telling me about her boy 'at the college'.   
  
I let him in, mumbling, "Sorry, I was in the shower," and looking for my purse. It was over on the couch. I turned away from him, walking over to the couch a few feet away. I leaned over the arm of the couch and pulled my purse toward me, looking for a tip. Ten seconds must have passed as I searched for enough change to give the guy a tip that didn't embarrass us both.   
  
Then it hit me. I felt a flush rush from my face to my chest and down through the rest of my body as I realized the view I was giving him. I stood up quickly and turned toward him holding out the seventy three cents I'd managed to find.  
  
His face was red, which surprised me, and he had trouble looking me in the eyes. His greasy hair and pimply skin suggested to me that he wasn't an expert in the realm of women. I quickly handed him his money, and he left, looking over his shoulder several times before I closed the door.  
  
That rush I felt when I realized that man could see my pussy as I bent over and my hoody rose up, baring my ass – that rush was the first positive feeling I'd had in 2 years. I was twenty two and I was ready to live again.  
  
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Two months later, I moved to a new city for a fresh start. There were too many memories that I had to leave behind.  
  
I had been fortunate, if you could call it that, because my mother had had a life insurance policy. I wasn't rich, but I had enough to live frugally on, for the next fifteen years if I had continued on the way I had been.  
  
I stayed at an inexpensive motel on the outskirts of town. I took the bus downtown each day and combed the newspapers and internet sites looking for a place to live that felt right. I was hoping for something with roommates who might include me in their lives. I knew nobody in town and wanted to start my new life that would include socialization.   
  
I called forty-seven people about shared accommodation. Of those, I took the bus the see eight places. After three days, I'd had no luck and decided to bus over to the local university to check out the bulletin boards in the student union.  
  
I was looking at the main bulletin board outside the entrance to the student union building when I heard a voice behind me, ''Are you looking for a place to live?"  
  
I turned around to look into the smiling face of a pair of girls I put between eighteen and twenty. They had a stack of flyers in their hand along with a box of tacks.   
  
"I am, but I've not been having much luck."  
  
"Well, we've got a ...." was the start of our friendship. The three of us went off to talk about the house they were living in and the room that was available. I have to be honest; at that stage I didn't care about the place – I was connecting with these women and enjoying myself. I had no expectations to live up to, no history to define me. I could be anyone I wanted.   
  
After a couple hours of talking and getting to know each other, they drove me over to their place to give me a tour. An hour later they drove me to the motel to pick up my single suitcase.   
  
I'd found a family.  
  
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I guess I should tell you something about myself and my new roommates. My name is Jennifer and I'm a 22 year old red head with big, wavy hair. My roommates were the blond Jenna and black haired Tomiko, both 20 and studying art at the College two blocks away.  
  
The house they were in was a small one story place with a long hallway separating 3 bedrooms on one side, and a living room, dining room, and kitchen on the other. At one end of the hall was the entrance to the house, and at the other was a bathroom we all shared, and a doorway to the fenced backyard. At the other end was the entrance to the garage and the front door.   
  
I was given the bedroom closest to the bathroom; apparently the pipes rattled in the morning when the hot water started flowing. It was then that I told my first fib, albeit a harmless one, "Don't worry about it – I sleep through anything." There was a nice large window in my room, letting bright sun in.   
  
I had a queen sized bed, though devoid of linen, a closet that could swallow twenty times the clothing I actually owned, and a dresser. Tomiko's room was a mess of clothes strewn everywhere, intermixed with art supplies and half-finished canvases. Jenna's was much cleaner, also filled with art supplies along with paintings and drawings filling every spot on her walls.   
  
"Here, you can borrow these sheets and this comforter," said Tomiko, as she came into my room. I was sitting on the bed, a smile on my face, having already hung up my clothes and put my toiletries on my dresser.   
  
I thanked her, and laughed, "Yeah, that's right, I'm a nudist," to a joking comment about my lack of clothing choices. I didn't think much of it at the time, and continued, "I don't have much stuff. I was living, well, I'm starting fresh and leaving my past behind. This is all I've got, so I know I've got some shopping to do. Want to hit the mall with me? I need some towels, sheets, all that sorta stuff. "  
  
Tomiko squealed with excitement and ran to get Jenna. The three of us piled into Jenna's car and headed off to shop.  
  
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A few hours later, we returned with my new purchases. As I put fresh, clean sheets onto my bed – returning the offered set to Tomiko with my thanks – Tomiko and Jenna made margaritas. I listened to them laughing in the kitchen between the roars of the blender. I was pleased to notice that I was smiling with them, thinking of the future, not the past. I'd put my new set of towels away already, and joined my new roommates in the kitchen.   
  
They greeted me with a strawberry margarita in a mason jar. It wasn't my first tonight, rather it was my third. We'd quickly accomplished my basic shopping needs, and got distracted by a visit to the pub on the outer edge of the mall we were at. We decided to come home before Jenna has more than one drink, stopping to pick up the fixings for our own drinks at home.  
  
We sat on the floor in the living room, leaning against the furniture as we talked and drank. I learned about Tomiko's family and that the house we were in was actually willed to her by her grandmother who had passed away a few months ago. Jenna, as well, shared tales of her youth and family. By the time my turn to share rolled around, we were all well into the realm of silly drunk, and I was just not sure what to say. I didn't want to go into my real history – it was just too depressing and to raw for me to talk about.   
  
When Jenna said, "So tell us your story, tell us why you came here with only a few changes of clothes – and all the same ones," I didn't know what to say and the silence stretched.  
  
The girls thought I was playing a game, and began throwing out suggestions to which I shook my head with a smile.  
  
"Were you a nun?"  
  
"Were you just released from a science lab after being grown in a jar?"  
  
"Are you a spy?"  
  
"Were you just released from jail?"  
  
We all laughed at each suggestion, but I wasn't sure how to change the topic and avoid talking about my past.   
  
"Wait, I've got it, " shouted Jenna,"... Jennifer, were you in a cult?"  
  
For the first time I froze and didn't instantly deny it. My brain, despite my drunkenness, seemed to fire rapidly. And that was when I lied to my new friends again.   
  
"Yes," I said quietly, lowering my eyes.  
  
There was silence, then they both started asking me questions to which I had to make up answers.  
  
"OK, let's talk about something else now," realizing that I'd lied my way down a road I might not be able to get off of. "I'll tell you that it was a small group, with some odd practices and I'm a bit messed up because of it. And I can never see them again or let them or any one I knew there again." This was closer to the truth.  
  
Tomiko saved me, "Hey, Jenna, let's give her a break. Come help me get us all more drinks. Jennifer, we'll be right back."  
  
They left the room as I sat there, relieved that I seemed to have delayed telling the truth about my past. I closed my eyes and leaned my head back onto the couch behind me. I thought about my lie and decided to stick with it. There was nobody to tell them about my past, and no reason for me to relive it. Being part of a cult could explain any odd mood swings I might have or odd social behaviours I showed after being so isolated for two years. And it explained the clothing. Cultists all wore odd clothes, didn't they?  
  
"Ahem," was the sound Jenna made that let me know they were back in the room. I opened my eyes, ready to receive a new drink. Then I opened my eyes wider.   
  
Tomiko and Jenna were standing there naked as could be.